

**CALIFORNIA WILDLIFE HABITAT RELATIONSHIPS SYSTEM**  
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B098 Black Scoter *Melanitta nigra*

Family: Anatidae Order: Anseriformes Class: Aves

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#### DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

The black scoter is an uncommon winter resident October to April on estuarine and marine waters near shore, along entire California coast, but most commonly north of Point Reyes, Marin Co. More numerous some years. Rare south of Los Angeles Co. (Cogswell 1977, McCaskie et al. 1979, U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service 1979, Garret and Dunn 1981).

#### SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

**Feeding:** Eats mostly marine invertebrates, especially bivalve mollusks, but also including gastropods, barnacles, and shrimp. Herring roe, and small amounts of aquatic plant materials also are consumed. Often feeds in groups, diving for food on bottom, preferably in water 3.6 to 9 m (12-30 ft) deep (Palmer 1976). Feeds in smooth or rough water, often just beyond the surf.

**Cover:** Rests on open water near shore, but beyond the surf, usually along exposed coast. Sometimes moves to sheltered waters during storms.

**Reproduction:** Does not nest in California. Nest is concealed in low vegetation, often on a hummock, usually near a pond or lake, in tundra or the northern forest zone.

**Water:** No additional data found.

**Pattern:** Found on bays, estuaries, and ocean near shore. For nesting, requires ground cover for nest concealment, near a lake or pond.

#### SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

**Activity Patterns:** Yearlong, mostly diurnal activity. Migration is nocturnal.

**Seasonal Movements/Migration:** The California wintering population migrates to breeding grounds in Alaska, and is absent from May to September.

**Home Range:** In 13 study areas in Iceland, Bengtson (1970) found an average density of 1 nest per 2 ha (5 ac). No additional information found.

**Territory:** No evidence of territoriality. Nests usually dispersed widely.

**Reproduction:** Does not nest in California. Pairs apparently form in winter, and nesting begins in late May or June. Monogamous, solitary nester. Clutch size 6-10, usually 7-8. Single-brooded. Incubation about 28 days. The precocial young are tended by the female only. Female leaves young before they attain flight, at 6-7 wk, or older. Breeds first at 3 or 2

yr.

Niche: Broods may merge to form creches (Ehrlich et al. 1988).

Comments: This species is poorly studied, and little literature is available.

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